

MEMORANDUM

TO: University Librarian
FROM: Maren Daniels
DATE: March 5th, 2023
SUBJECT: Our Donor's Collection

BACKGROUND

As you may have heard, our library has recently received a very generous donation of \$2 million in unrestricted funds from an anonymous donor under one condition, being that we accept their personal collection for our own library. However, upon reviewing this collection myself, it has come to my attention that the contents of this collection revolve around Holocaust Denial. With our recent wave of staff cuts and an increasingly lowering budget, this puts our library in a very delicate position. Our library is scrambling to piece together funding and provide the best possible services to our students and clientele.

STEPS TO TAKE

I am of the opinion that accepting this offer is historical erasure, something that we can not in good conscience accept as purveyors of knowledge. On one hand, we could make the decision to accept this offer but supplement the collection with more references and information revolving around the Holocaust, as well as donating and partnering with major Holocaust Awareness or Jewish-based organizations and charities. However, I do not believe that this would be the correct way to proceed in this situation. By choosing the side of neutrality, we do not outright condemn bigotry and hatred, giving tacit permission and validation for those who do hold these toxic world views. Diversity and inclusivity are major tenants of our university, and it would be betraying our own mission to accept this collection and funding. In tandem with these tenants, our library is committed to showcasing and celebrating diverse lives throughout our materials.

Another potential option would be to accept the offer but provide a disclaimer that the views are baseless. I also am not sure if this is the correct position to take, as this gives the work more exposure regardless. As

important as it is to receive funding, and as much as \$2 million would ease our financial burden, I do not think that we morally can accept this offer. As a university library, we must be committed to providing our students and other visitors with resources of the highest quality and only display materials that are based on factual evidence. As substantial as this donation is, I am of the conviction that it would be morally corrupt to accept this offer.

OUR RESPONSE

In the event that our wealthy donor and/or their supporters try to advocate for us to accept this donation, they may bring up Article II of the ALA Library Bill of Rights, which states that “Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.” We could refute this by arguing that Holocaust denial is not a partisan issue, but rather a misinformation campaign fueled by anti-Semitism. There is overwhelming evidence that the Holocaust was a real tragedy that happened less than a century ago and claimed the lives of at least 11 million. (The National WWII Museum New Orleans).

On that note, we also may propose Article III of the same Bill of Rights as our own defense. Article III states that “Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.” The Holocaust Denial movement aims to censor the real life stories of both Holocaust victims and survivors. While librarians have a commitment to provide information and materials regardless of origin or stance, the provision of Holocaust denial actively harms real life communities who are still facing discrimination for their identities. We can not in good conscience perpetuate these ignorant and hateful views and give them the exposure that they so desire.

A PROPOSAL

To offset this offer, and to secure more funding as well, I propose that we seek to partner with an organization(s) or charit(ies) that promotes Holocaust education and/or the advocacy for Jewish people and other populations that were forever impacted by the Holocaust. This partnership would entail in a dedicated Holocaust section for our library, as well as potential funding for us and these charities as well. Through this partnership, we could also host a number of events and guest speakers. This would be a great benefit for our History department as well, who could also participate in this potential collaboration and perhaps even create a new class or even an internship revolving around the subject.

Through this proposed partnership, we can also collaborate with the chosen organization(s) for a variety of educational fundraising events. One such event that could take place is to host a series of TED talks and invite faculty members, students, Holocaust experts, and survivors while encouraging donations to the university library and participating organizations. A series of panels and Q&A sessions about World War II history would also be deemed appropriate. All proceeds will be split between the participating parties.

A SOLUTION

To make up for the funding that will not be received after denying this donation, we must pool together other resources and strategies in order to generate adequate funding while continuing to provide state of the art library services. I will take on the responsibility of applying for a variety of grants and other aid as a way to continue growing our library's collection. Over the remainder of the school year, we should heavily emphasize the advent of inter-library loans to our students. This will allow us to continue providing resources and materials for our students while not dedicating as much funding to the continued development of our library until further notice. I also recommend potentially selling our older, more outdated materials and use the funding from their sales as a way to generate an updated collection. We could also potentially sell a variety of materials that have not been checked out or used in at least 5 years, and sell these as well. I hate the notion of discarding a variety of our own materials, but I would much rather do this than accept the \$2 million donation.

I also believe that student voices are crucial to amplify, as they will always first and foremost be our library's target audience. I would like to conduct a survey of every student who checks out a resource, and ask them a variety of questions such as "How familiar are you with the university library's inter-library loan program?" "What kinds of resources do you wish your library had more of?" "What is your favorite aspect of the library?" and "Please organize the following services in their order of personal use". This will allow us to gain a specific insight into the attitudes of our student patrons, as well as a newfound perspective to use while deciding which library services to improve or remove.

One final proposal is to reach out to local businesses and alumni and encourage them to make or propose a matching donation program with their company or employers. By leveraging matching donations, we can not only fund our library, but other organizations will receive a number of donations as well.

MARKETING

One proposed idea for generating more funds is via marketing and exposure. Recently, there has been a trend on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok of teachers and librarians creating content and reaching viral status this way. If we were to create a social media presence for our library, we would not only be marketing, but bringing more attention to the University in general, potentially increasing our admissions rate. We could work with the Admissions office in preparation for this as well. Some content that we could have on these platforms are book and film reviews, library information, memes, historical lessons and fun facts, and behind the scenes hijinks and stories of our faculty, which I have noticed to become a popular trend over the past few years. By doing this, we can portray a compelling (and truthful) narrative that showcases how important our library is to our university's culture to the general public.

CONCLUSION

This is certainly a tumultuous time for our library community, but I would much rather do the right thing rather than take money that supports a cause that we as an academic institution do not agree with. This is a multifaceted situation where both us and the donor have tenants in the Bill of Rights that support our views, but while this may be a bit of a grey area, we cannot show complicity by neutrality, and show our vehement disapproval for a historical erasure movement that is fueled by bigotry. While this money would be life changing for our library, I believe that we should locate funding elsewhere and resort to other means to secure stability. Through collaboration, marketing, fundraising, and exposure, we can find a way to balance the funds lost by denying this collection with funds gained elsewhere.

WORKS CITED

The National WWII Museum New Orleans. (n.d.). *The Holocaust*. The War.

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/holocaust>